

Hobbies

Why some recent coin sets are better buys than others

By Roger Boye

Here are answers to more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—On Jan. 28 you said that uncirculated coin sets made in 1985 and 1986 have more than doubled in value while others are selling for less than their government issue price. Why have the 1985s and 1986s done so well?

C. K., Chicago

A—Prices paid for government

coin sets on the hobby market are governed by the law of supply and demand. In general, the more sets that federal officials sell during the year of issue, the worse the sets will perform as investments.

Uncle Sam made a relatively small number of uncirculated sets in the middle of the past decade (1.7 million in 1985 and 1.2 million in 1986), charging \$7 each. Today, those sets retail for at least \$19 and \$30 each.

The 1981 uncirculated set—which has a production total of 2.9 million, one of the highest on record—trades today for about \$3 less than its \$11 issue price. Similarly, the 1980 set (2.8 million made) sells for about \$5, compared with a \$9 issue price.

Incidentally, special promotions by large dealers sometimes can artificially boost the market prices of coin sets or other collectibles.

Q—Is there an easy way to distinguish between the 1970 small- and large-date Lincoln cents?

E. P., Norridge

A—Not really. You should study pictures of 1970 cents or buy a sample of each coin type from a dealer to use as comparisons. Beyond that, it will take raw eye power—or a sharp magnifying glass—to decipher your cents.

Q—I've got several gold-plated silver medals made by the Franklin Mint during the 1970s. They commemorate famous events in history, among other things. Are my medals worth their weight in gold?

H. D., Western Springs

A—No, but they are worth their weight in silver. Most medals issued by private companies during the 1960s and 1970s sell today for their "metal value"—nothing more—because the number of such items produced greatly exceeds the number of collectors.

The gold plating has almost no value. If your medals are pure silver and the size of half dollars, they each would contain about

three-quarters of an ounce of silver, worth \$4 at current precious-metal prices.

Q—I used some tape to fix a ripped \$5 bill—series 1907—that I found in an old book. What might the item be worth?

M. R., Chicago

A—The bill still is "legal tender" but the tear means that it would have little additional value as a collectible. You could exchange your "find" at a bank for some fresh spending money.

Q—I found a "blank coin" inside a roll of newly made nickels. Is it rare?

P. T., Chicago

A—An unstruck nickel slug would retail for \$5 or less, according to a standard hobby reference.

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The annual show of the Lake County Coin Club will be held next Sunday. Hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Waukegan Moose Lodge, 2755 Washington St., Waukegan. Admission is free.